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Front Edit Other
Page Page Page

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VERY few people know what the Central Intelligence Agency is up to around the world. But every now and then the public gets a glimpse of CIA activities. When the U-2 was shot down over Russia, the CIA suffered momentary exposure. When the Bay of Pigs invasion it planned turned into a tragic failure, the CIA was seen to blush. It surfaced a bit in South Viet Nam when its people got into a dispute with State Department personnel over the degree to which they conspired in local politics and policies.

Now the CIA has been uncovered in an intriguing situation — by, of all things a congressional subcommittee looking into the tax exempt status of private foundations. The committee found to its surprise that the CIA was channeling some of its funds through the J. M. Kaplan Foundation for unrevealed purposes. The committee dropped the whole business as it would a hot potato.

IT shouldn't be surprising that the CIA uses such vehicles as a private foundation to do some of its secret work. This is a cloak and dagger operation which deals in such nasty business as bribery, espionage and similar activities. It uses private groups and individuals as well as universities and other institutions in its myriad undercover works.

The foundation discovery does, however, raise again the question of whether this country should tolerate invisible government to such a degree. Some committee of Congress should be privy to the CIA's major activities as a protection for the public.

CONGRESS could set up a group similar to the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, which has managed to keep an eye on that area of secret government activity without hurting our security.

The CIA has made enough blunders to justify Congress in trying to make sure that they won't be repeated. It has gotten into policy areas where it has no legitimate business. It has spent huge sums of money with no public accounting. Undoubtedly it has done much that is important to our nation and its security. But why should it escape the gaze of a congressional watchdog? Several congressmen have introduced bills to create a joint committee of Congress to keep watch on the CIA. It is time one of them passed.